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SUBJECT: Another Monument to a Repressor

**¶11.** (U) On May 26, authorities unveiled a statue of Felix Dzerzhinsky on the grounds of Belarus' Military Academy. The 10.5-foot bronze statue is identical to the one that for years stood in front of the KGB's infamous Moscow headquarters, the Lubyanka, and was the first icon removed by demonstrators in 1991 after the fall of the Soviet Union.

**¶12.** (U) Known as "Iron Felix," Dzerzhinsky, who was born in what is now Belarus, played an active role in the 1917 Bolshevik Coup and founded the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage (Cheka)--the most feared Soviet agency known for abductions, torture, and massacres. The Cheka later developed into the NKVD and later the KGB. During the Soviet Union's existence, Iron Felix stood as a symbol of KGB terror.

Support and Outrage

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**¶13.** (U) The dedication of a monument to Dzerzhinsky outraged several opposition activists and human rights leaders. Jailed activist Nikolay Statkevich equated the statue to a symbol of civil war, the extermination of an entire social stratum, and the massacre of the intelligentsia and Russian elite. According to Statkevich, Iron Felix was a historic figure that Belarusians should not be proud of. Human rights lawyer for the Belarusian Helsinki Committee Oleg Gulak called the monument a sign of the "final establishment of dictatorship in Belarus" and an insult to the millions of victims repressed by the "machine" created by Dzerzhinsky. Both activists likened GOB policies to those of Dzerzhinsky and noted that the only aspect missing in Belarusian dictator Aleksandr Lukashenko's regime were mass killings. Head of Belarus' border guards General Aleksandr Pavlovsky, however, defended the statue and considered Iron Felix an historic figure responsible for creating and strengthening Belarus' border guards. Head of the BKGB Stepan Sukharenko showed support by attending the dedication ceremony.

Dzerzhinsky Already a "Hero"

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**¶14.** (U) The statue to Dzerzhinsky is not the only monument to the former Chekist. In downtown Minsk opposite the BKGB headquarters stands a bust to Iron Felix, erected in 2004. A museum dedicated to the founder of the Soviet terror machine is located in his home village, now called Dzerzhinsk (25 kilometers from Minsk). The village is a "Mecca" to the BKGB, where graduating BKGB cadets make a pilgrimage to pledge an oath to live by the example set by Dzerzhinsky.

Comment

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15. (SBU) Lukashenko does not keep secret his admiration for Soviet leaders known for their brutality. In August 2005, Lukashenko squandered unknown amounts of money to recreate and dedicate an insignificant portion of Belarus' pre-WWII defense line to Joseph Stalin. The GOB published a political biography on Stalin, highlighting his "successes" as a leader and glossing over (or ignoring) all the crimes against humanity he committed (reftel).

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